

Chicago Tribune, June 20, 2007

WASHINGTON -- Rep. Mark Kirk asked the Bush administration last month to investigate whether Pakistan has lost control of nuclear material, based on government advertisements in Pakistani newspapers that Kirk said raise "serious questions" about that nation's nuclear stockpile and whether terrorists could obtain any of it.

The administration has not responded to the letter or to requests for comment from the Tribune. Pakistani officials say Kirk (R-Ill.) is misreading the ads and that their stockpile is secure.

"There is no possibility of any nuclear or other sensitive material falling into the wrong hands," said Khawar Hanif, the defense attache at the Pakistani Embassy in Washington.

Kirk is a member of the House appropriations subcommittee on foreign operations and works one weekend a month as a naval intelligence officer. He has visited Pakistan four times as a congressman.

On May 3, Kirk wrote President Bush to express concerns over ads in Pakistan's Urdu-, Sindhi- and Pashtu-language newspapers -- but none of its English papers -- that display the international yellow-warning sign for nuclear material. The ads, placed by the Pakistan Nuclear Regulatory Authority, warn anyone who sees such a sign to step away from the material and call a reporting hot line.

Kirk noted that in 2004, Pakistan's top nuclear scientist admitted funneling nuclear material to Iran, North Korea and Libya. He said the recent ads suggest "that our concerns over the safety and security of Pakistan's nuclear arsenal could be greater than we first suspected."

Hanif said the ads were part of a broad government awareness program, which he likened to announcements at airports warning passengers to be on the lookout for unattended luggage. He said he was surprised the ads caused any controversy and that Kirk did not call the

embassy directly to discuss them. No one from the Bush administration questioned them, he added.

Kirk said Tuesday that his concerns persist, in large part because Pakistan has never run ads like this before, and because the ads did not appear in English-language newspapers.

"This is a big deal," he said. "They seem to be trying desperately to make it boring."